

METHOD OF MAKING A PATTERNED MAGNETIC RECORDING HEAD

Field of the Invention

5 This invention relates generally to magnetic recording heads and more particularly to a method of making thin-film magnetic heads for imprinting time based servo patterns on a magnetic media.

Background of the Invention

10 While a variety of data storage mediums are available, magnetic tape remains a preferred forum for economically storing large amounts of data. In order to facilitate the efficient use of this media, magnetic tape will have a plurality of data tracks extending in a transducing direction of the tape. Once data is recorded onto the tape, one or more data read heads will read the data from those tracks as the tape advances, in the transducing direction, over the read head. It is generally not feasible to provide a separate read head for each data track, therefore, the read head(s) must move across the width of the tape (in a translating direction), and center themselves over individual data tracks. This translational movement must occur rapidly and accurately.

15 In order to facilitate the controlled movement of a read head across the width of the media, a servo control system is generally implemented. The servo control system consists of a dedicated servo track embedded in the magnetic media and a corresponding servo read head which correlates the movement of the data read heads.

20 The servo track contains data, which when read by the servo read head is indicative of the relative position of the servo read head with respect to the magnetic media in a translating direction. In one type of traditional arrangement, the servo track was divided in half. Data was recorded in each half track, at different frequencies. The servo read head was approximately as wide as the width of a single half track. Therefore, the servo read head could determine its relative position by moving in a translating direction across the two half tracks. The relative strength of a particular frequency of data would indicate how much of the servo read head was
25 located within that particular half track.

While the half track servo system is operable, it is better suited to magnetic media where there is no contact between the storage medium and the read head. In the case of magnetic tape,

the tape actually contacts the head as it moves in a transducing direction. Both the tape and the head will deteriorate as a result of this frictional engagement; thus producing a relatively dirty environment. As such, debris will tend to accumulate on the read head which in turn causes the head to wear even more rapidly. Both the presence of debris and the wearing of the head have a tendency to reduce the efficiency and accuracy of the half track servo system.

Recently, a new type of servo control system was created which allows for a more reliable positional determination by reducing the signal error traditionally generated by debris accumulation and head wear. US Patent No. 5,689,384, issued to Albrect et al. on November 19, 1997, introduces the concept of a timing based servo pattern, and is herein incorporated by reference in its entirety.

In a timing based servo pattern, magnetic marks (transitions) are recorded in pairs within the servo track. Each mark of the pair will be angularly offset from the other. Virtually any pattern, other than parallel marks, could be used. For example, a diamond pattern has been suggested and employed with great success. The diamond will extend across the servo track in the translating direction. As the tape advances, the servo read head will detect a signal or pulse generated by the first edge of the first mark. Then, as the head passes over the second edge of the first mark, a signal of opposite polarity will be generated. Now, as the tape progresses no signal is generated until the first edge of the second mark is reached. Once again, as the head passes the second edge of the second mark, a pulse of opposite polarity will be generated. This pattern is repeated indefinitely along the length of the servo track. Therefore, after the head has passed the second edge of the second mark, it will eventually arrive at another pair of marks. At this point, the time it took to move from the first mark to the second mark is recorded. Additionally, the time it took to move from the first mark (of the first pair) to the first mark of the second pair is similarly recorded.

By comparing these two time components, a ratio is determined. This ratio will be indicative of the position of the read head within the servo track, in the translating direction. As the read head moves in the translating direction, this ratio will vary continuously because of the angular offset of the marks. It should be noted that the servo read head is relatively small compared to the width of the servo track. Ideally, the servo head will also be smaller than one half the width of a data track. Because position is determined by analyzing a ratio of two

time/distance measurements, taken relatively close together, the system is able to provide accurate positional data, independent of the speed (or variance in speed) of the media.

By providing more than one pair of marks in each grouping, the system can further reduce the chance of error. As the servo read head scans the grouping, a known number of marks should be encountered. If that number is not detected, the system knows an error has occurred and various corrective measures may be employed.

Of course, once the position of the servo read head is accurately determined, the position of the various data read heads can be controlled and adjusted with a similar degree of accuracy.

When producing magnetic tape (or any other magnetic media) the servo track is generally written by the manufacturer. This results in a more consistent and continuous servo track, over time. To write the timing based servo track described above, a magnetic recording head bearing the particular angular pattern as its gap structure, must be utilized. As it is advantageous to minimize the amount of tape that is dedicated to servo tracks, to allow for increased data storage, and it is necessary to write a very accurate pattern, a very small and very precise servo recording head must be fabricated.

Historically, servo recording heads having a timing based pattern have been created utilizing known plating and photolithographic techniques. A head substrate is created to form the base of the recording head. Then, a pattern of photoresist is deposited onto that substrate. The photoresist pattern essentially forms the gap in the head. Therefore, the pattern will replicate the eventual timing based pattern. After the pattern has been applied a magnetically permeable material such as NiFe is plated around the photoresist pattern. Once so formed, the photoresist is washed away leaving a head having a thin film magnetic substrate with a predefined recording gap.

Alternatively, the ion milling is used to form a first layer having a relatively large gap. A pattern of photoresist is applied in an inverse of the above described pattern. That is, photoresist is applied everywhere except where the timing based pattern (gap) is to be formed. Ion milling is used to cut the gap through the first layer. Then an additional layer of the magnetically permeable material is deposited by plating over the first layer and a narrow gap is formed into this layer by the above described photolithographic process. This approach produces a more efficient head by creating a thicker magnetic pole system.

While the above techniques are useful in producing timing based recording heads, they also limit the design characteristics of the final product. In the first method, only materials which may be plated can be utilized, such as NiFe (Permalloy). Generally, these materials do not produce heads which have a high wear tolerance. As such, these heads will tend to wear out in a relatively short time. In addition, this class of materials have a low magnetic moment density (10 kGauss for NiFe), or saturation flux density, which limits their ability to record on very high coercivity media.

The second method also relies on plating for the top magnetic layer and is therefore limited to the same class of materials. In addition, the use of ion milling makes the fabrication of such a head overly complex. The photoresist pattern can be applied relatively precisely; thereby forming a channel over the gap. However, the traditional ion milling technique is rather imprecise and as the ions pass through that channel they are continuously being deflected. Conceptually, in any recording gap, so cut, the relative aspect ratios involved prevent a precise gap from being defined. In other words, this is a shadowing effect created by the photoresist and causes the gap in the magnetically permeable material to be angled. Generally, the sidewalls of the gap will range between 45° - 60° from horizontal. This introduces a variance into the magnetic flux as it exits the gap, resulting in a less precise timing based pattern being recorded onto the servo track.

Therefore, there exists a need to provide a magnetic recording head capable of producing a precise timing based pattern. Furthermore, it would be advantageous to produce such a head having a tape bearing surface which is magnetically efficient as well as wear resistant and hence a choice of sputtered rather than plated materials are required. Thus, it is proposed to use a fully dry process to fabricate a time based head using predominantly iron nitride based alloys.

Summary of the Invention

The present invention relates to a method of fabricating a magnetic recording head, and more particularly a recording head for producing a time based servo pattern.

A substrate consisting of a ceramic member, glass bonded between a pair of ferrite blocks is prepared. The substrate is then cleaned, polished and if desired, ground to a particular curvature. On top of this substrate, a magnetically permeable thin film is deposited, preferably

by a sputtering process. The thin film is selected from a class of materials having a high wear tolerance as well as a high magnetic moment density, such as FeN. The alloys in this class of materials need to be sputtered onto the substrate, as other thin film deposition techniques, such as plating, are incompatible with these materials.

5 Once the thin film is present, the substrate is placed within the path of a focused ion beam (FIB) orthogonally oriented to the major surface of the thin film. The FIB is used to mill a complex patterned gap through the thin film layer. This gap is extremely precise and will allow the recording head to accurately produce a similar pattern on magnetic tape.

10 The FIB must be controlled to only mill the patterned gap and no other portion of the thin film. To define these parameters within the FIB control system, several techniques are available. In general, a non-destructive pattern is applied to the surface of the thin film. A graphical interface within the FIB control system allows the operator to visually align the pattern with the FIB milling path. One way to accomplish this is to apply a very thin layer of photoresist to the thin film. A mask is then employed to create the very precise gap pattern. Because photoresist is
15 visually distinct from the remainder of the substrate, the FIB can be aligned with this pattern. As opposed to the usual thick film photoresist used in traditional ion milling as a protective layer (or selectively etched layer), the photoresist in the present invention will serve no other purpose in the milling process. Alternatively, numerical coordinates, representing the gap to be cut, can be directly entered into the FIB control system.

20 Once the gap or gaps have been cut into the thin film, the substrate is coupled with a coil to produce a functional recording head.

It is an object of the present invention to provide a method of making a magnetic recording head having a precisely defined gap structure.

25 It is another object of the present invention to produce a magnetic recording head utilizing a focused ion beam to define the gap and track width structure.

It is still another object of the present invention to simultaneously define and create all three dimensions of a gap structure in a magnetic head.

It is yet still another object of the present invention to fabricate a magnetic recording head wherein the gap depth is determined primarily by the thickness of the deposited thin film.

Furthermore, the choice of materials may also vary so long as blocks 12 remain magnetic while member 14 remains magnetically impermeable.

A layer of magnetically permeable material is deposited as a thin film 16 across an upper surface of each of the ferrite blocks 12, as well as the upper surface of the ceramic member 14.

5 The magnetically permeable thin film 16 will become the tape bearing and data writing surface for the magnetic head 5 (see Figs. 12 & 13). As such, it is desirable to form the layer of thin film 16 from a material which has a relatively high magnetic moment density (greater or equal to about 15 kGauss) and is also wear resistant. An exemplary material for this purpose is FeN or alternatively Sendust™. For example, FeN has a magnetic moment density on the order of 19 to
10 20 kGauss and is resistant to the frictional deterioration caused by continuous tape engagement. Any of the alloys in the iron nitride family, such as iron aluminum nitride, iron tantalum nitride, etc., and including any number of elements, are also ideally suited. FeXN denotes the members of this family, wherein X is a single element or a combination of elements, as is known in the art.

FeXN is created by sputtering a FeX alloy (or simply Fe) in a nitrogen rich environment.
15 It is not available in quantities sufficient for plating. Furthermore, even if so available, the FeXN would decompose during the electrolytic plating process. This is in stark contrast to the simple alloys which may be readily utilized in electrolytic plating techniques. Therefore, while it is advantageous to use alloys, such as FeXN, magnetic recording heads cannot be formed with them, in any previously known plating process. In addition, the most desirable alloys to use are
20 often composed of three or more elements. Plating is generally limited to the so called binary alloys, and as explained above is not conducive to binary gaseous alloys, such as FeN. The use of sputtering in combination with the use of a FIB, not only allows any of these materials to be used but also produces a better wearing magnetic thin film with a higher saturation flux density and of sufficient permeability for use as a servo write head.

25 Referring again to Figure 1, the thin film 16 is sputtered onto the surface of the ferrite blocks 12 and the ceramic member 14. Prior to the sputtering process, the surface is polished and prepared in a manner known to those skilled in the art. If desired, the surface may be ground to produce a slight curvature. This curvature will facilitate smooth contact between the tape and the completed head 5 as the tape moves across the tape bearing surface.

The thickness of the deposited thin film 16 determines the efficiency of the magnetic head and also its predicted wear life. The thicker the tape bearing surface (thin film 16) is, the longer the head will last. Conversely, the thicker the magnetic film, the longer it will take to process or etch with a FIB and it will also process less precisely. Therefore, the thin film should be deposited in a thickness of about 1 to 5 μ m. Ideally, the thickness will be about 2 to 3 μ m.

Figure 2 is a top view of the substrate 10 and in particular the major surface of magnetic thin film 16 with the underlying ceramic member 14 shown in dashed lines. The area 18 is defined by the upper surface of the ceramic member 14 (the magnetic sub-gap) and is where the appropriate gaps will eventually be milled.

Referring to Figure 3, only area 18 is shown. Within area 18, some indicia 20 of the eventual gap positions are laid down. It should be noted that two diamond shaped gaps are to be milled as shown in Figure 3; however any shape and any number of gaps could be created. Indicia 20 is simply an indication of where the FIB is to mill. One way of accomplishing this is to place a layer of photoresist 22 down and define the indicia 20 with a mask. Using the known techniques of photolithography, a layer of photoresist 22 will remain in all of area 18 except in the thin diamond defined by indicia 20. Alternatively, the photoresist area could be substantially smaller than area 18, so long as it is sufficient to define indicia 20. The photoresist differs in color and height from the thin film 16 and therefore produces the visually discernible pattern. This pattern is then registered with the FIB control system through a graphical interface; thus delineating where the FIB is to mill. The photoresist serves no other purpose, in this process, than to visually identify a pattern. As such, many alternatives are available. Any high resolution printing technique capable of marking (without abrading) the surface of the thin film 16 could be used. Alternatively, the pattern could be created completely within the FIB control system. That is, numerical coordinates controlling the path of the FIB and representing the pattern could be entered; thus, obviating the need for any visual indicia to be placed onto the magnetic thin film 16. Finally, a visual pattern could be superimposed optically onto the FIB graphical image of the substrate 10, thereby producing a visually definable region to mill without actually imprinting any indicia onto the substrate 10.

In any of the above described ways, the FIB 24 is programmed to trace a predefined pattern, such as the diamond indicia 20 shown in Figure 3. The FIB will be orientated in a plane orthogonal to the major surface of the thin film 16.

Figure 4 is a sectional view of Figure 3, taken about line IV-IV and illustrates the milling process utilizing FIB 24. The upper surface of the thin film 16 has been coated with a thin layer of photoresist 22. The visual indicia 20 of the diamond pattern is present, due to the area of that indicia 20 being void of photoresist. The FIB 24 has already milled a portion of the pattern forming gap 30. The FIB as shown has just begun to mill the right half of the pattern. The beam of ions 26 is precisely controlled by the predefined pattern which has been entered into the FIB's control system. As such, the beam 26 will raster back and forth within the area indicated by indicia 20. The beam 26 will generally not contact a significant amount of the photoresist 22 and will create a gap 30 having vertical or nearly vertical side walls. The width of the ion beam is controllable and could be set to leave a predefined amount of space between the edge of the side wall and the edge of the indicia 20. The FIB 24 will raster back and forth until all of the indicia 20 have been milled for that particular head.

After the FIB 24 has milled all of the gap(s) 30, the photoresist 22 is washed away. Alternatively, any other indicia used would likewise be removed. Figure 5 illustrates area 18 of substrate 10 after the photo resist 22 has been removed. Thin film 16 is exposed and has precisely defined gaps 30 milled through its entire depth, down to the ceramic member 14. Figure 6 is a sectional view of Figure 5 taken about line VI-VI of Figure 5 and illustrates the milled surface of gap 30. The gap 30 is precisely defined, having vertical or nearly vertical walls.

Referring to Figure 14, a partial perspective view of a time based recording head 5 is shown. The major surface 50 of thin film 16 lies in a plane defined by width W , length L , and depth D . D is the deposited thickness of the magnetic film 16. The FIB will always mill through thin film 16 through a plane perpendicular to the major surface 50 which would also be parallel to depth D . By conventional standards, the gap 30 will have a magnetic gap depth equal to depth D and a gap width equal to width W and a gap length (L') equal to the span of gap 30.

The upper surface of thin film 16, shown in Figure 7, represents one of many alternative time based patterns which may be created using a FIB 24. Here, gaps 30 will be milled in

exactly the same fashion as described above, except that indicia 20, when utilized, would have formed the pattern shown in Figure 7. Figure 8 is a sectional view taken about line VII-VII of Figure 7 and shows how gap 30 continues to have precisely defined vertical sidewalls. Furthermore, the upper horizontal surface 32 of ceramic member 14 is also precisely defined.

5 Figure 9 illustrates yet another pattern which may be defined using FIB 24. Here, gap 30 is in the shape of an augmented diamond. Rather than defining a diamond having connected corners, gap 30 is milled to have termination cells or endpoints 34, 35, 36 and 37. Creating endpoints 34, 35, 36 and 37 increases the definition of the finished recorded pattern near the ends of the track.

10 The next step in the fabrication process is to create air bleed slots 40 in the tape bearing surface of the substrate 10, as shown in Figure 10. Once substrate 10 has been fabricated into a recording head, magnetic tape will move across its upper surface in a transducing direction, as shown by Arrow B. Therefore, the air bleed slots 40 are cut perpendicular to the transducing direction. As the tape moves over the recording head at relatively high speed, air entrainment
15 occurs. That is, air is trapped between the lower surface of the tape and the upper surface of the recording head. This results from the magnetic tape, comprised of magnetic particles affixed to a substrate, being substantially non-planar on a microscopic level. As the tape moves over the recording head, the first air bleed slot encountered serves to skive off the trapped air. The second and subsequent slots continue this effect, thus serving to allow the tape to closely contact the
20 recording head. As the tape passes over the recording gap(s) 30, it is also held in place by the other negative pressure slot 42,43 encountered on the opposite side of the gap(s) 30. Therefore, there is a negative pressure slot 42,43 located on each side of the recording gap(s) 30.

 Figure 11 is a side view of the substrate 10, as shown in Figure 10. The upper surface of the substrate 10 has a slight curvature or contour. This acts in concert with the air bleed slots to
25 help maintain contact with the magnetic tape. The air bleed slots 40 are cut into the substrate 10 with a precise circular saw, as is known by those skilled in the art. The air bleed slots 40 are cut through thin film 16, which is present but not visible in Figure 11. Alternatively, the air bleed slots 40 could be cut prior to the thin film 16 having been deposited.

 Substrate 10 has been longitudinally cut, thus removing a substantial portion of the
30 coupled C-shaped ferrite blocks 12 and ceramic member 14. This is an optional step which

results in an easier integration of the coils and ferrite blocks. Figure 13 illustrate how a backing block 46 is bonded to substrate 10. The backing block 46 is composed of ferrite or another suitable magnetic material. Wiring is wrapped about the backing block 46 thus forming an electrical coil 48. With this step, the fabrication process has been completed and a magnetic recording head 5 has been produced.

In operation, magnetic recording head 5 is secured to an appropriate head mount. Magnetic tape is caused to move over and in contact with the tape bearing surface of the head 5, which happens to be the thin film layer 16. At the appropriate periodic interval, electrical current is caused to flow through the coil 48. As a result, magnetic flux is caused to flow (clockwise or counterclockwise in Figure 13) through the back block 46, through the ferrite blocks 12, and through the magnetic thin film 16 (as the ceramic member 14 minimizes a direct flow from one ferrite block 12 to the other causing the magnetic flux to shunt through the permeable magnetic film). As the magnetic flux travels through the magnetic thin film 16, it leaks out through the patterned gaps 30, thus causing magnetic transitions to occur on the surface of the magnetic tape, in the same pattern and configuration as the gap 30 itself.

Referring to Figures 10 and 12, it can be seen that the width of the head 5 (or substrate 10) is substantially larger than a single patterned gap 30. This allows the recording head to bear a plurality of patterned gaps 30. For example, Figure 10 illustrate a substrate 10 having five recording gaps 30 which could then write five servo tracks simultaneously. More or less can be utilized as desired and the final size of the head 5 can be adjusted to whatever parameters are required.

Rather than cutting the substrate 10 as shown in Figure 11 and applying a coil as shown in Figure 13, the substrate 10 could remain whole and the coils could be added to the C-shaped ferrite blocks 12, as they are shown in Figure 1.

The above head fabrication process has been described with respect to a magnetic recording head employing a timing based servo patter. However, the process could be applied equally well to any type of thin film recording head. That is, those of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the FIB milling of the gaps could accommodate any shape or pattern, including the traditional single gap used in half-track servo tracks.



Those skilled in the art will further appreciate that the present invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from the spirit or central attributes thereof. In that the foregoing description of the present invention discloses only exemplary embodiments thereof, it is to be understood that other variations are contemplated as being within the scope of the present invention. Accordingly, the present invention is not limited in the particular embodiments which have been described in detail therein. Rather, reference should be made to the appended claims as indicative of the scope and content of the present invention.